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## The Story of a Fern Garden—I

EDWARD HALE CLARKSON

In planning my fern garden I had rather ambitious ideas, especially as instead of being under fine old trees in a picturesque woodland valley with an inviting trout brook, this garden was to be in a city yard with a prosaic rubber hose to furnish water.

What I wanted was not merely a place where ferns would grow. For several years I had been studying the ferns in the woods, having in mind the eventual construction of this garden, and had learned to appreciate how effectively their beauty is brought out by appropriate surroundings. Therefore I had visions of green trees, and enticing paths bordered by clumps of mountain laurel and pungent sweet-pepper bushes, a place of restful leafy shade shut off as much as possible from all surrounding sights of civilization by a screen of shrubbery. And then, having prepared the setting, I would fill it in with the real gems—the ferns—and perhaps with a few of the choicest wild flowers.

SELECTING THE LOCATION.—The place selected for the garden was the southerly half of a rectangular piece of lawn, the whole area being 120 by 90 feet. This was bordered on three sides by good-sized trees—spruce, sugar maple, red maple, several concolor firs, a picturesque clump of canoe birches, a white pine, and an old cherry tree—these trees not only making a very attractive frame for the garden, but also furnishing considerable shade and a first-class wind break. Along the easterly and southerly boundaries of this lawn ran a solid board fence nearly six feet high, which while admittedly not particularly ornamental was of real value in shutting out drying and destructive winds. The whole area sloped gently toward the north, thus insuring good drainage, and the soil was a good sandy loam.

CONSTRUCTION.—Having removed the turf from a strip along the fence averaging from thirty to forty feet wide and one hundred feet long, I staked out my paths, one long one running the full length, and several cross paths, the result being the dividing of the coming garden into nine various sized and irregular shaped “islands,” as I call them, on which to plant my trees, shrubs, and ferns. There was also a border from three to six feet wide extending along the fence a distance of about one hundred and fifty feet. None of my paths were built in a straight line, and I paved some of them with irregular stone, making them attractive in appearance, and also furnishing a firm dry walk for the early spring days when the ground is soft and muddy. On my “islands” I planted about thirty trees—sugar maple, red oak, American linden, moose maple, beech, red maple, willow,—these trees averaging from ten to fifteen feet tall, with good branching tops for shade, and I scattered them about irregularly to give as natural an appearance to my little “woods” as possible. As these trees grew larger, I, of course, planned to cut out more or less of them, keeping only the most desirable. Under the trees I grouped clumps of Mountain Laurel, Sweet-Pepper bushes, *Azalea viscosa*, *Azalea nudiflora*, *Rhododendron catawbiense*, and the common Barberry. I also raised the surface of all my “islands” several inches by spreading over them a mixture of peat and sandy leaf mould. This left my paths much lower than the rest of the garden, for I had planned these paths to also serve as gutters to carry off surplus water.

GOING AFTER THE FERNS.—All was now ready for the ferns. A horse of mature age, a wagon ditto, several suits of old clothes, and a good heavy grub hoe, all played important parts in my many collecting trips. The first of these was after the “big three,” the *Osmundas*. At Pettingell’s swamp, a strip of wet woods

lying along the salt marshes of Newbury, these ferns grew by the thousands. To my mind there is no sight more beautiful than the unrolling of the fronds of these big ferns, and the day I went after them it happened that they were in exactly the right condition to transplant, the crosiers being partly unrolled, so that it was easy to select the most vigorous plants. Even with a new heavy grub hoe with a very sharp cutting edge, it was strenuous work wrestling with the tough old roots of these plants, many of which had apparently been there for an hundred years or more. Some of the clumps that I hewed and pried out must have weighed over two hundred pounds, and it was quite an engineering feat to get them into the wagon. These were taken home and planted the same day on *Osmunda* "island" in my garden. Actually I won these ferns "by the sweat of my brow," and was badly lamed up for the next few days.

The finest clump of the Dodge hybrid (*Dryopteris cristata*  $\times$  *marginalis*) that I have in my garden is one that I found on Friday, April 13, 1917. Up to that date I had never seen this fern growing. So I started off in the morning determined to spend the day in hunting for it, and, incidentally, to try and shatter forever the "Friday, the 13th," superstition. At that time the fronds of all the evergreen ferns were, of course, flat on the ground, but I knew a promising rocky valley where both the parent ferns grew, and, after hunting for about an hour, was rewarded by finding a splendid clump of seven plants. The fertile fronds, which had been remarkably well preserved by a heavy blanket of snow that had covered the ground most of the winter, were large and delightfully irregular, measuring nearly three feet in length.

Although strongly tempted to give details of other most interesting journeys after the ferns, I realize that

to do so would unduly lengthen this article. Spread out over two seasons, these collecting trips finally resulted in the filling in of all my "islands," and today my garden is actually "overflowing."

THE FERN GARDEN TODAY.—Good-sized clumps of the giant Osmundas with their masses of tall foliage give a very natural and "woody" appearance to my garden. I have used the Interrupted fern more freely than either of the other two. At its best this fern is a wonderfully fine foliage plant, and deserves to be used extensively to beautify private grounds and public parks. In this section it may be had in unlimited quantities for the digging, and will grow large and thrifty if given plenty of moisture. Moreover, it keeps its fresh light-green color all through the summer, and seems to have few insect enemies.

The Ostrich fern is superb early in the season, and this also I have used in masses to advantage. Unless unusually well protected from the wind, however, it is apt to get rather shabby in late summer.

The Christmas fern is a great favorite of mine and the good-sized clumps of this evergreen, with its rich olive glossy foliage, are very effective planted along and close to the paths. After the frosts have cut down the less hardy species in the autumn it is a pleasure to see this fern still as handsome and thrifty as ever.

The Braunii is a very attractive fern, and grows well for me, but it is much more difficult to succeed with than is the Christmas fern.

The most attractive family of ferns, however, is the "Dryopteris" group. The eight so-called "wood-ferns," *D. spinulosa*, *intermedia*, *dilatata*, *Clintoniana*, *cristata*, *marginalis*, *Goldiana*, and *Filix-mas* are, to my thinking, in a class all by themselves and are very satisfactory. Five of these are evergreen; all of the eight are fine big ferns, are easily grown, and certainly

are extremely beautiful. The Goldiana is superb, and is by many persons considered our finest New England species. It is most effectively used as an individual plant. *Dryopteris intermedia* because of its exquisite fine-cut evergreen foliage and its endless variation is particularly attractive, and a good-sized garden could be devoted to this one species to advantage.

The hybrids, *D. cristata*  $\times$  *intermedia* and *D. cristata*  $\times$  *marginalis* are both good garden ferns. I have a dozen clumps of the first-named, and they are so thrifty and vigorous that they always attract much attention.

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(To be continued.)

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### More Interesting Fern Localities.

Mr. Winslow's article on Willoughby Lake as the richest fern locality has served to set those of us who live in north-central Connecticut counting our species. The results show that we cannot surpass the Vermont lists in number of species and do not possess anything quite so rare as the Hart's-tongue at Green Lake, but that we have a region with a diversified fern flora and different in many of its conditions from any of those treated by Mr. Winslow. So, rather by way of comparison than competition we are moved to say something of our own treasure-spots for ferns.

The central lowland of Connecticut comprises the valley of the Connecticut River north of Middletown and those of the Farmington and Quinnipiac west of it. The underlying rock throughout is a red sandstone of Triassic age. According to the geologists, it was, at three different times during the period of its deposition, broken by lateral pressure. Through the openings thus made, molten lava (trap rock) was forced up from below and spread out into great sheets, at first horizon-